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The Secrets

## political book notes

The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA. Thomas Powers. Alfred A. Knopf, \$12.95. This is a meticulously researched, prudently balanced account of the highlights of the agency's history and its most cautious professional leader, Richard Helms, a man who for 30 years was at the center of national and international intrigue.

Powers talked to all the principals in that drama still living. He read all the documents available to researchers and all the narratives others have written. The result is a remarkably lucid revelation of the moral ambiguity of a career in clandestine intelligence.

Working in the CIA's Clandestine Services created a personality Powers sums up thus: "CIA people are cynical in most ways, but their belief in secrets is almost metaphysical. In their bones they believe they know the answer to that ancient paradox of epistemology which asks: If a tree falls in the forest without witness, is there any sound? The CIA would say no. . . . If no one knows we tried to kill Castro, then we didn't do it. If ITT's role in Chile is never revealed, then commercial motives had nothing to do with the Allende affair. If the CIA's role in overthrowing Mossadegh remains hidden, then the Iranians did it all by themselves. If Operation Chaos remains a secret, the CIA never joined the FBI as a threat to American liberties. If no one knows how many Free World leaders had to be bribed, then we were something purer than the highest bidder. . . ."

—Joseph Burkholder Smith